

An Ancient Tale from
ANDAMAN

Retold by
Anvita Abbi

Illustrations
Partha Sengupta

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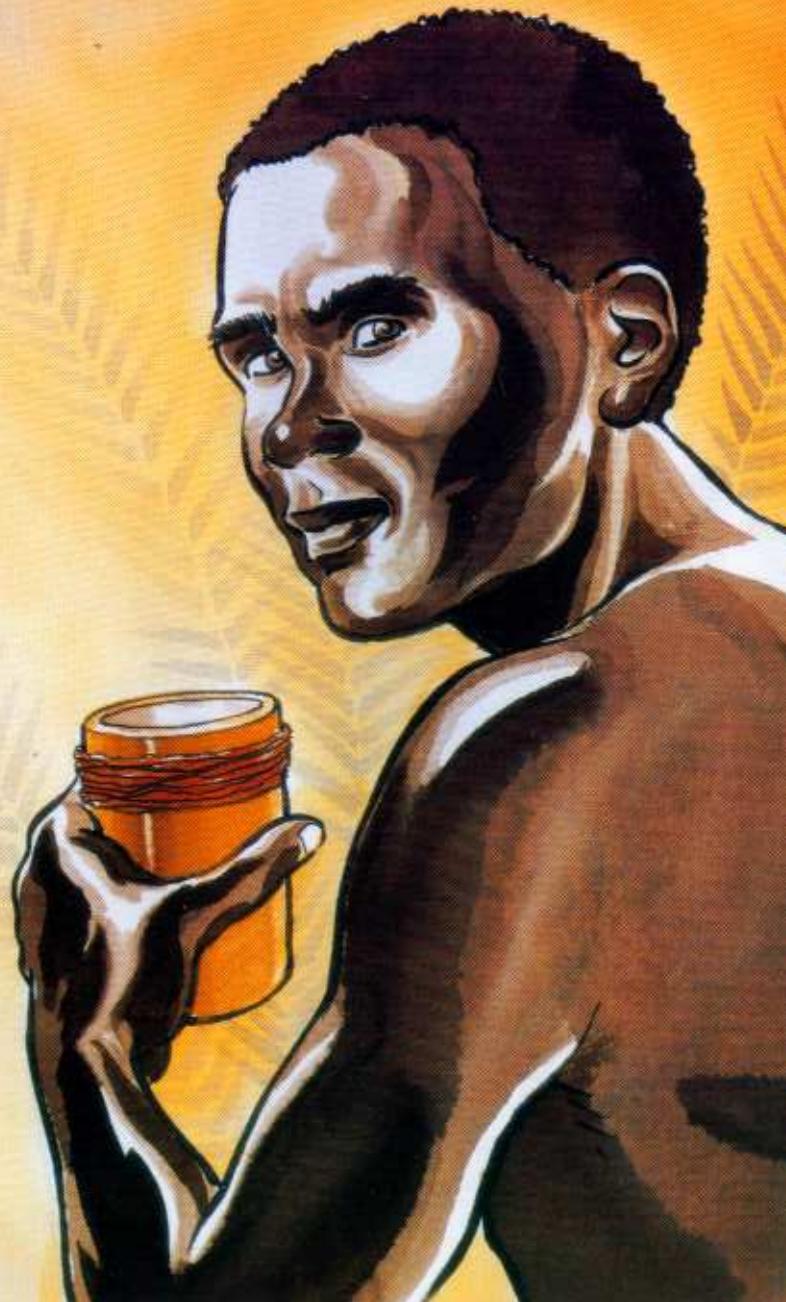
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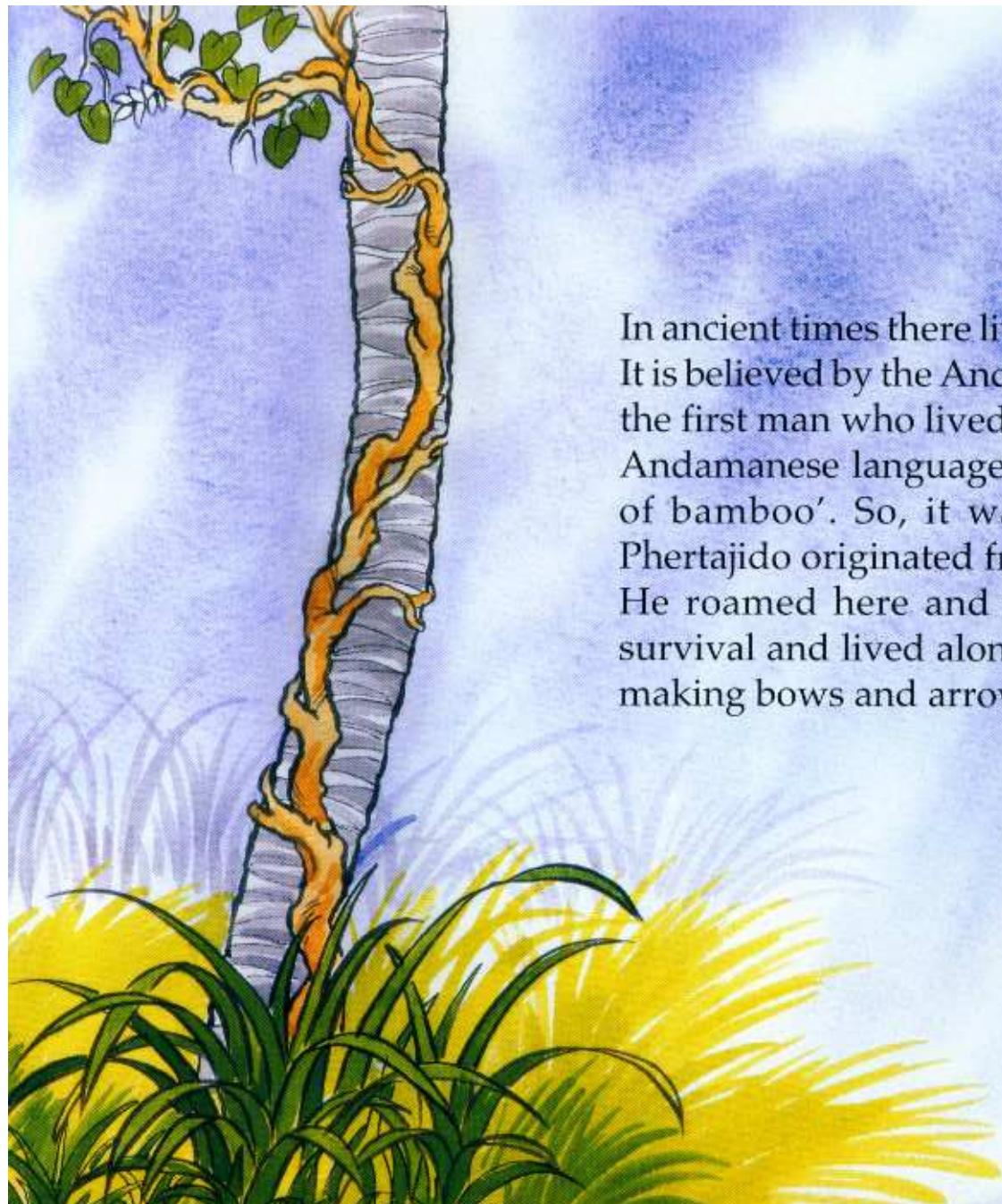
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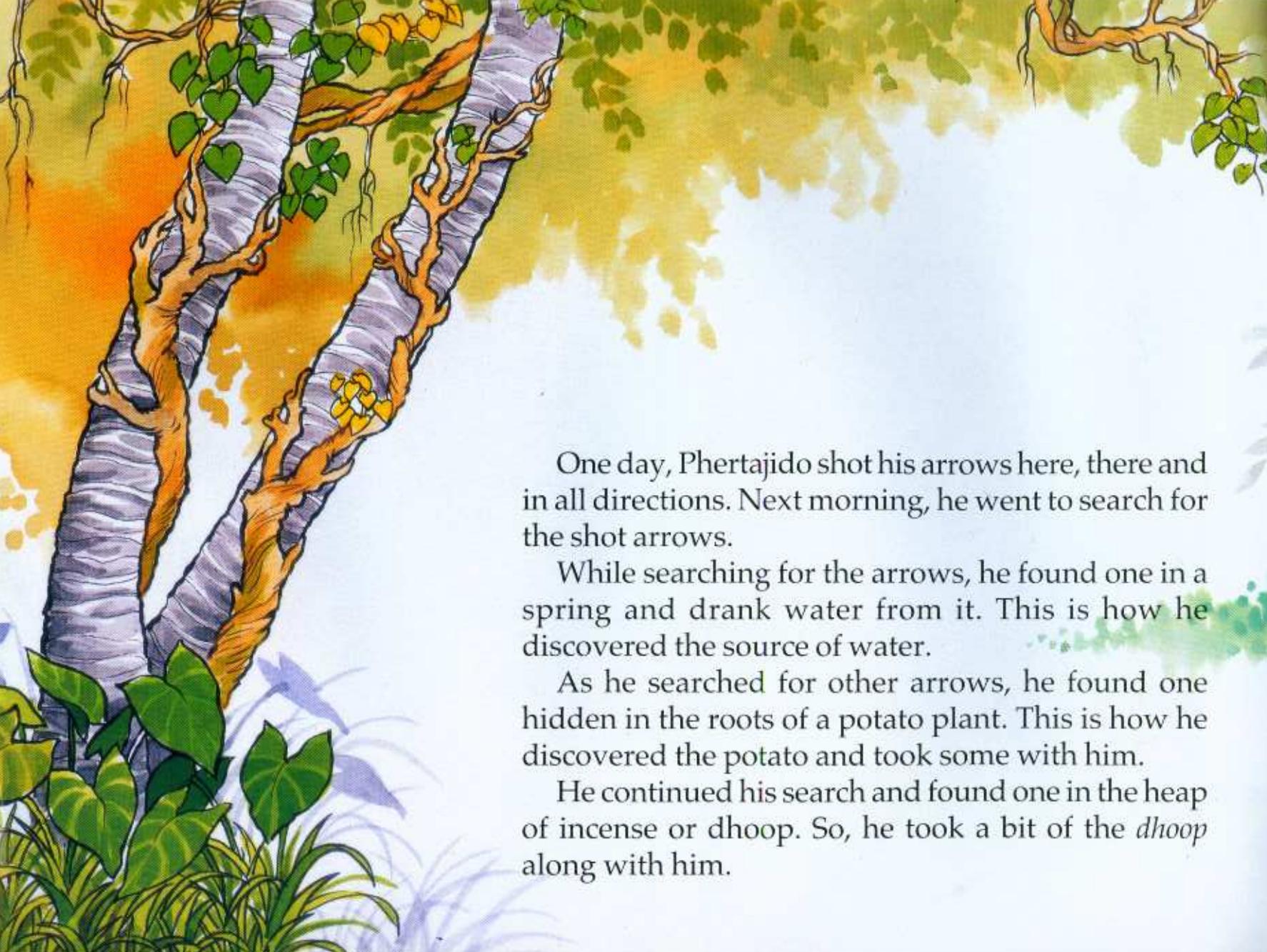
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In ancient times there lived a man named Phertajido. It is believed by the Andamanese that Phertajido was the first man who lived on the Andaman islands. In Andamanese language Phertajido means 'born out of bamboo'. So, it was generally believed that Phertajido originated from the hollow of a bamboo. He roamed here and there in search of food for survival and lived alone. He spent most of his time making bows and arrows.



One day, Phertajido shot his arrows here, there and in all directions. Next morning, he went to search for the shot arrows.

While searching for the arrows, he found one in a spring and drank water from it. This is how he discovered the source of water.

As he searched for other arrows, he found one hidden in the roots of a potato plant. This is how he discovered the potato and took some with him.

He continued his search and found one in the heap of incense or *dhoop*. So, he took a bit of the *dhoop* along with him.





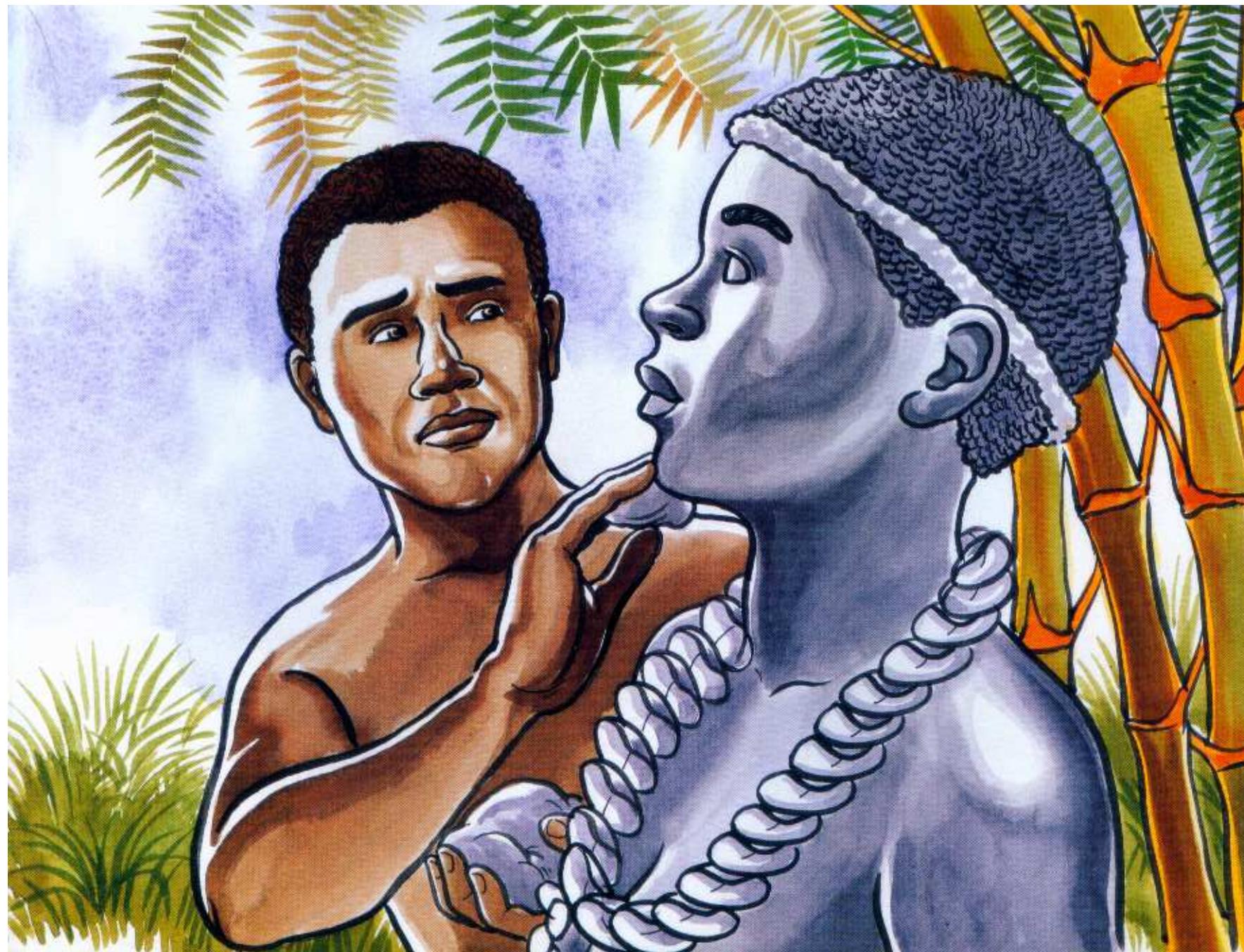
Phertajido went further to look for more of the shot arrows. This time he found a very fine soil of *Kot*. He took some of this also.

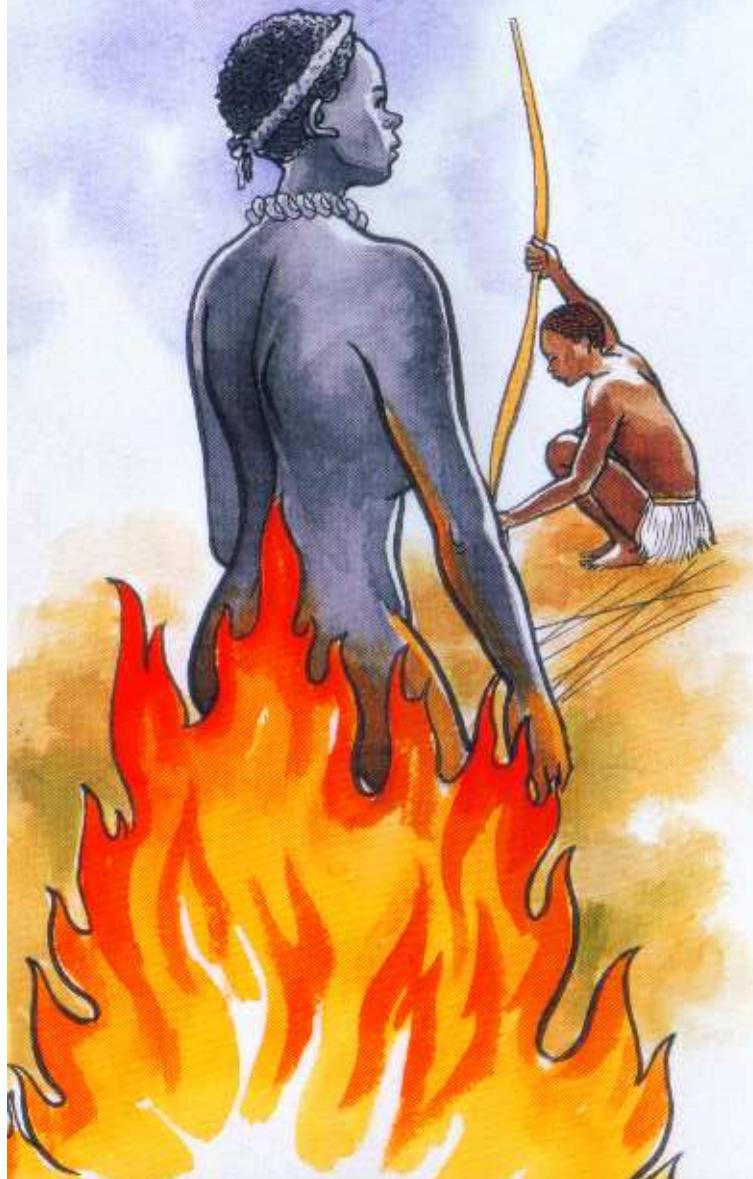
Out of the soil, he made pots. He kept them for drying. When the pots were dry they became hard. Then he placed some potatoes in the pot and boiled them on fire. He enjoyed the meal of boiled potatoes.

While eating potatoes, an idea struck him. Why not carve a sculpture from the remaining *Kot*!

He wasted no time and in a few days made a human like dummy out of the *Kot* soil.

Phertajido placed this dummy on a raised platform and burnt some fire under it so as to dry it well. Thereafter, he resumed his bow making.



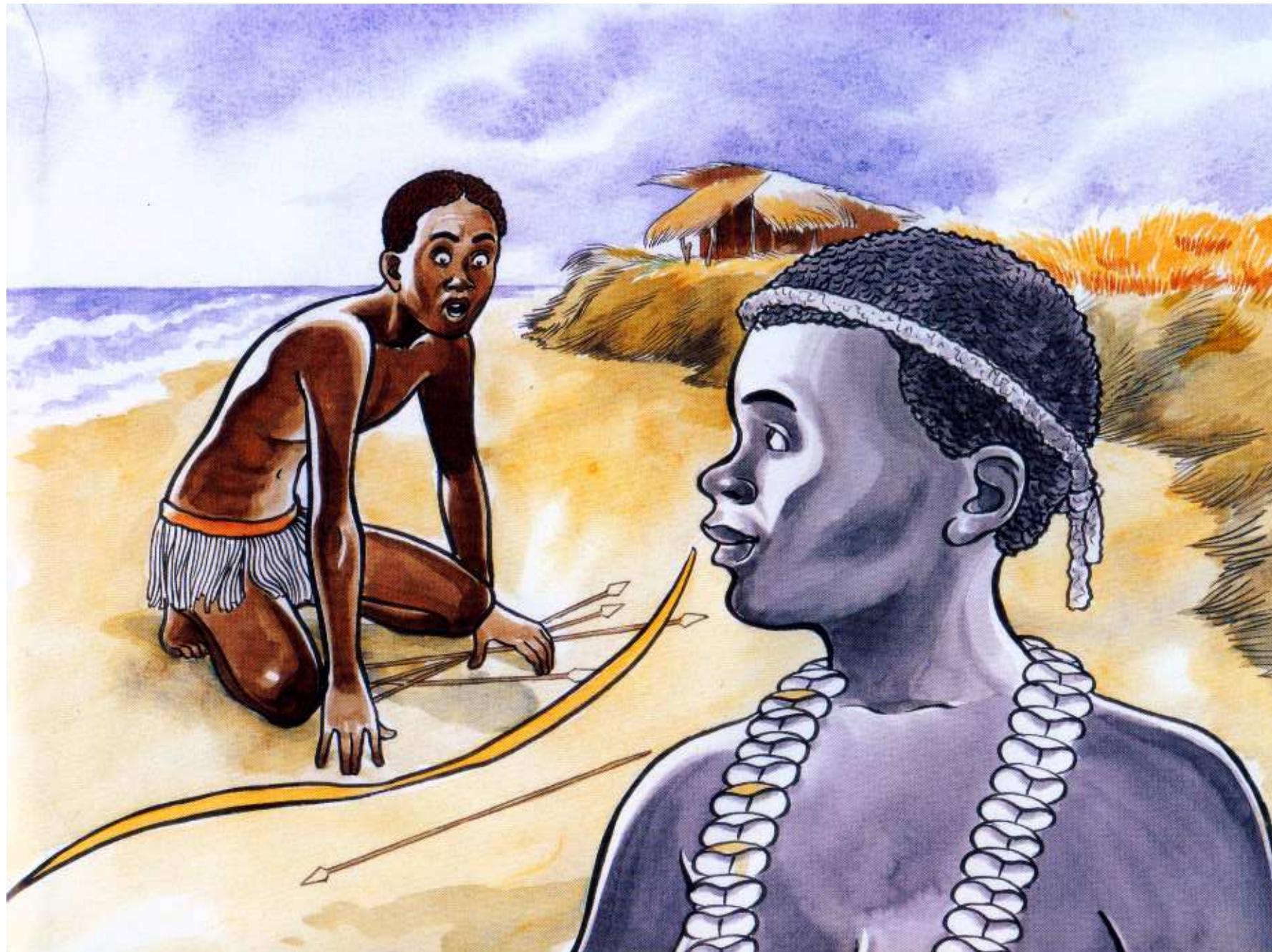


Every now and then he would look at the dummy on the platform while engaged in making bows and arrows. He ensured that the Kot did not fall down. He was immensely satisfied with his work. Occasionally, he would get up put some more wood into the fire and resume with bow peeling job. After some time, he looked back again.

Surprise! Surprise! The platform shook as the female figure of Kot turned her side. Phertajido was overwhelmed. He stood up again to kindle the fire and complete the job of drying the figure.

Tired of making bows, he decided to go to the jungle for hunting. He left the Kot on the platform for it to be dried completely. He found game and proceeded home with it.

As he approached home, he glanced at the platform from a distance. The platform was empty! He was shocked and felt dejected.



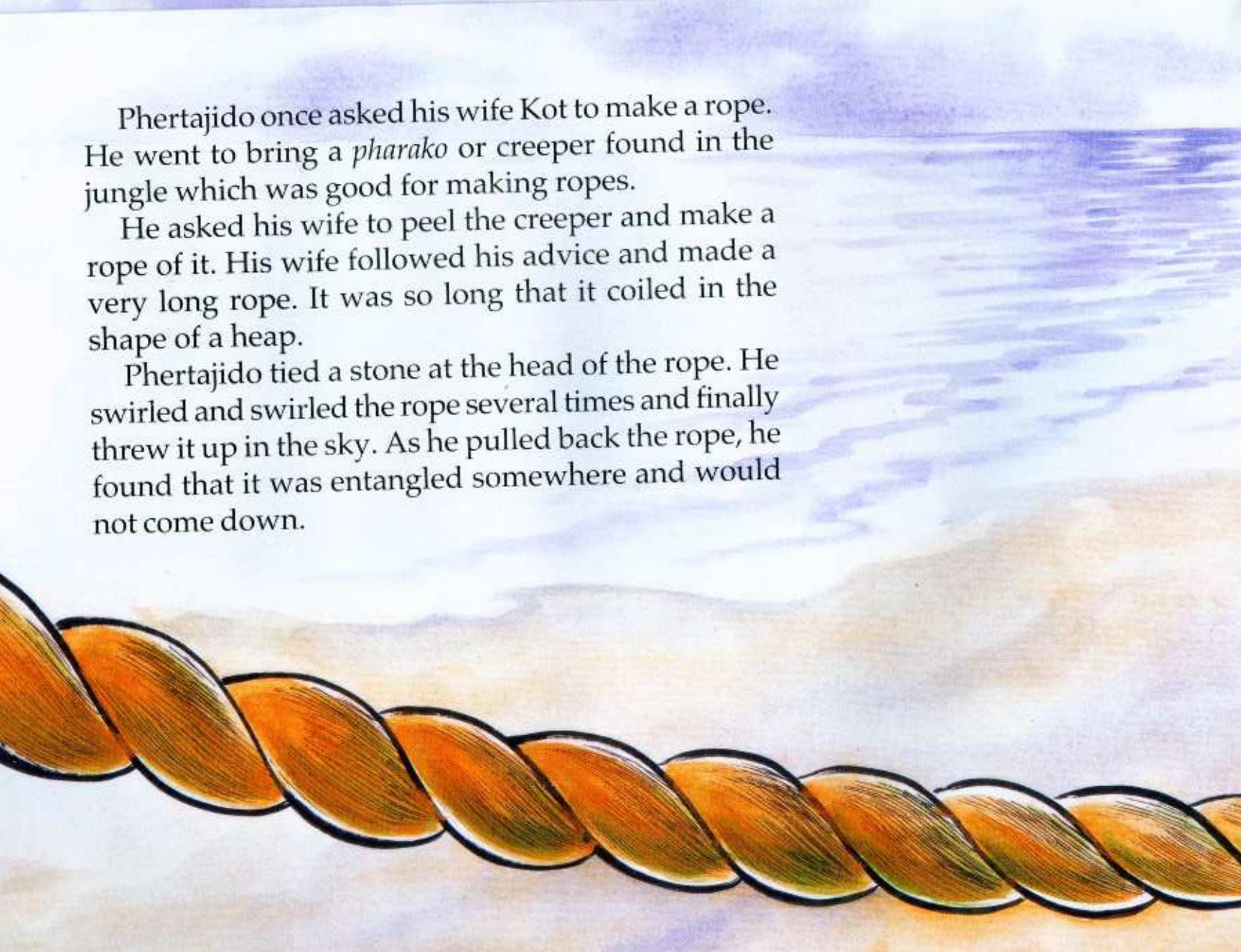


Putting down the hunt, he sighed, "Where did Kot disappear?" Gripped with a sad feeling he sat down with a heavy heart. He wondered as to where she could disappear.

Lady Kot was inside the house but Phertajido was oblivious of the fact. Kot saw Phertajido from inside the house and started laughing. She laughed and laughed until she got tired of it. Surprised at the sound, Phertajido looked back. He saw Kot sitting inside the house laughing merrily.

Phertajido ran to her. He embraced Kot and started crying out of sheer joy. After that, both of them started living together as husband and wife. They had many children. Their children married among themselves and thus their clan increased by leaps and bounds.

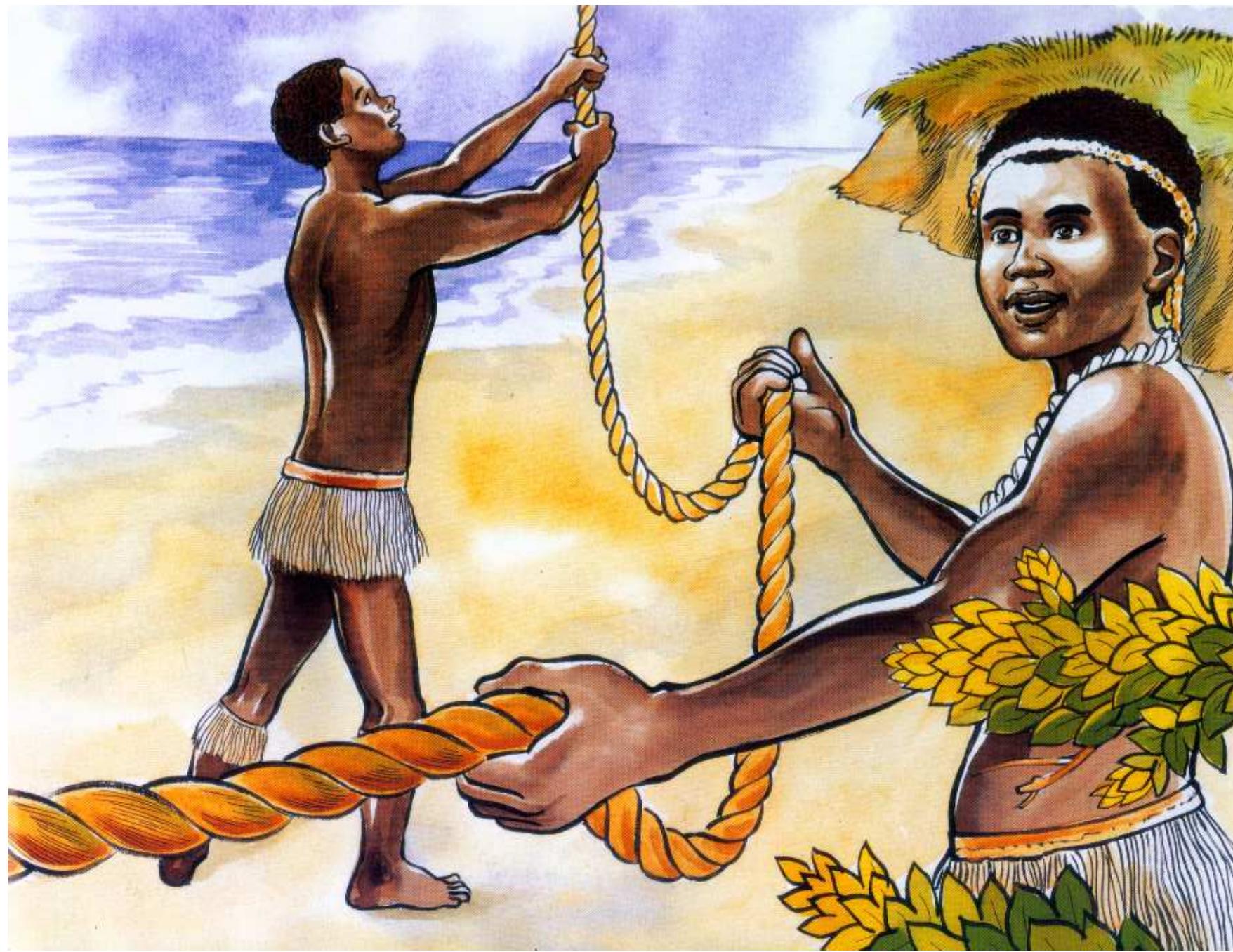


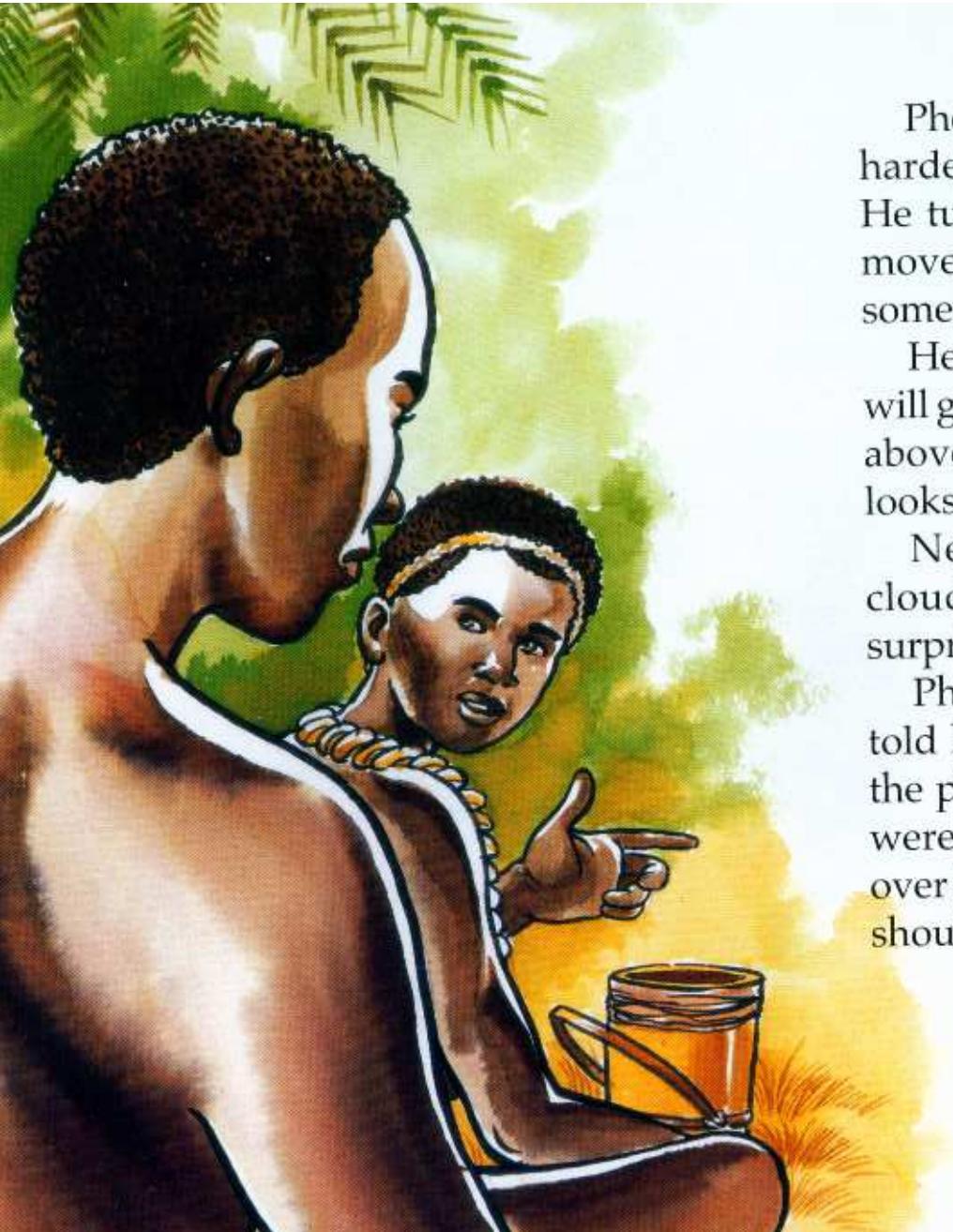


Phertajido once asked his wife Kot to make a rope. He went to bring a *pharako* or creeper found in the jungle which was good for making ropes.

He asked his wife to peel the creeper and make a rope of it. His wife followed his advice and made a very long rope. It was so long that it coiled in the shape of a heap.

Phertajido tied a stone at the head of the rope. He swirled and swirled the rope several times and finally threw it up in the sky. As he pulled back the rope, he found that it was entangled somewhere and would not come down.



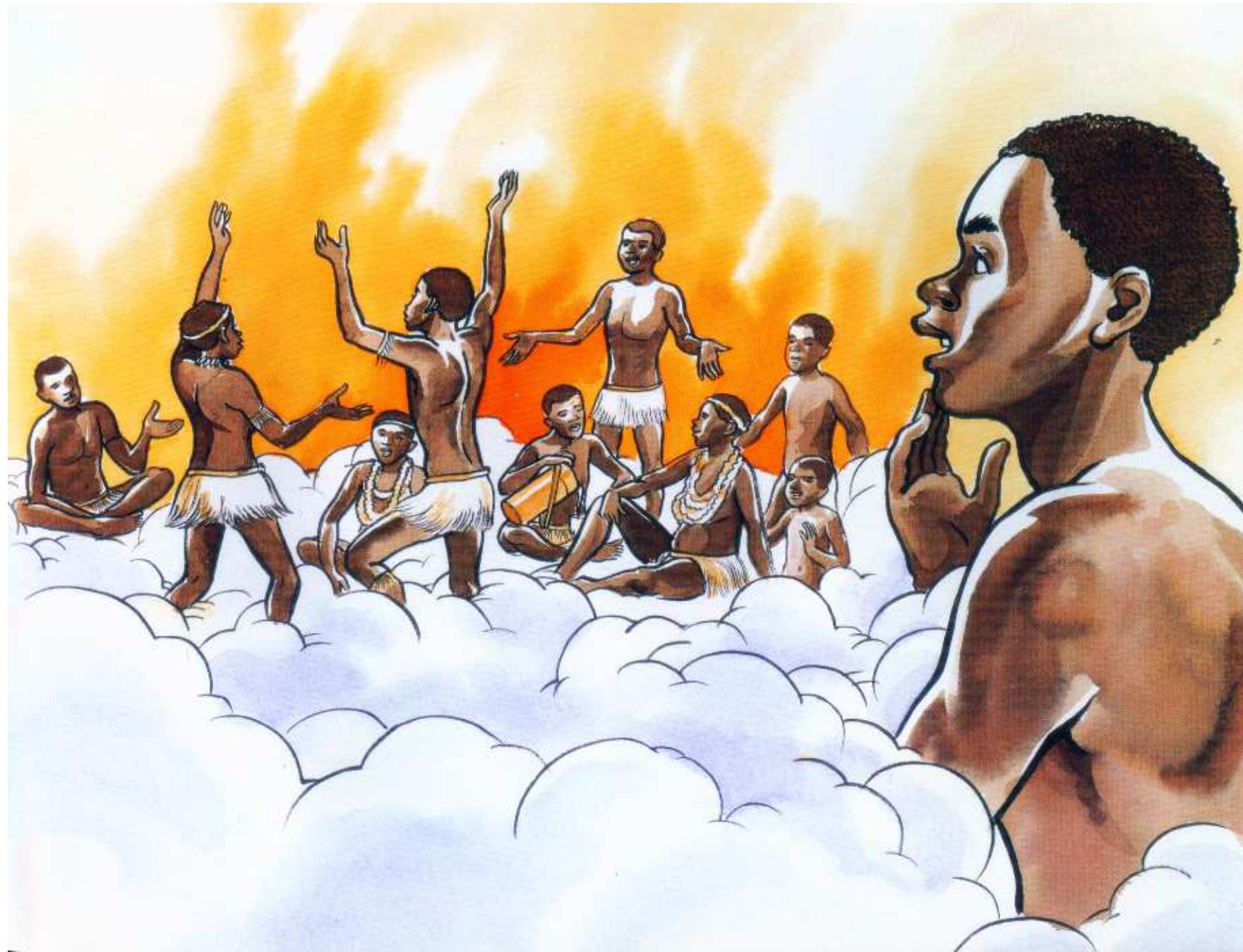


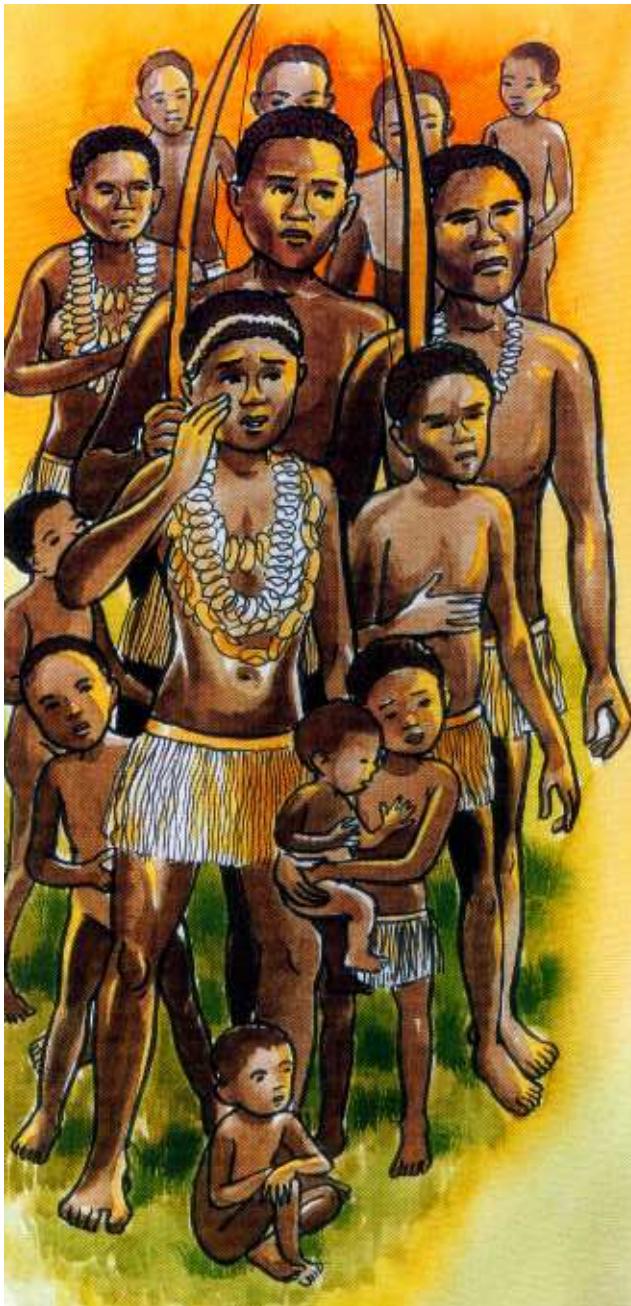
Phertajido twisted the rope to make it harder. The rope tightened and stiffened. He tugged at it, but the rope would not move. He knew that the rope was stuck somewhere.

He went to call Kot. He said to her, "I will go up above the clouds to see the place above us. I will find out how the place looks like. I will go there tomorrow."

Next day he climbed up above the clouds. He reached the place and was surprised to find many people like himself.

Phertajido came back to the earth and told his wife about this. He told her that the place above them was nice and there were many people like the Andamanese over there. He suggested that both of them should go there.



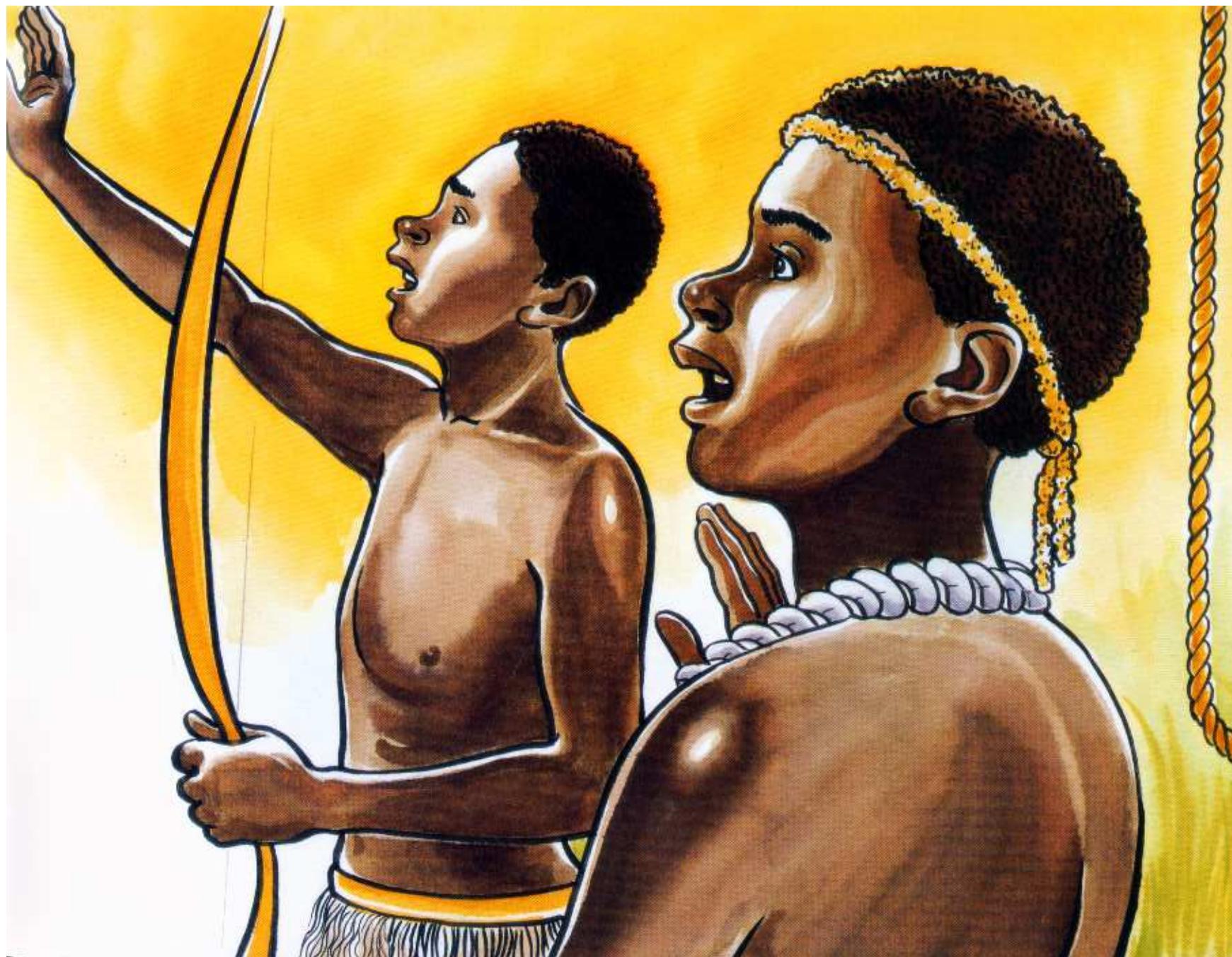


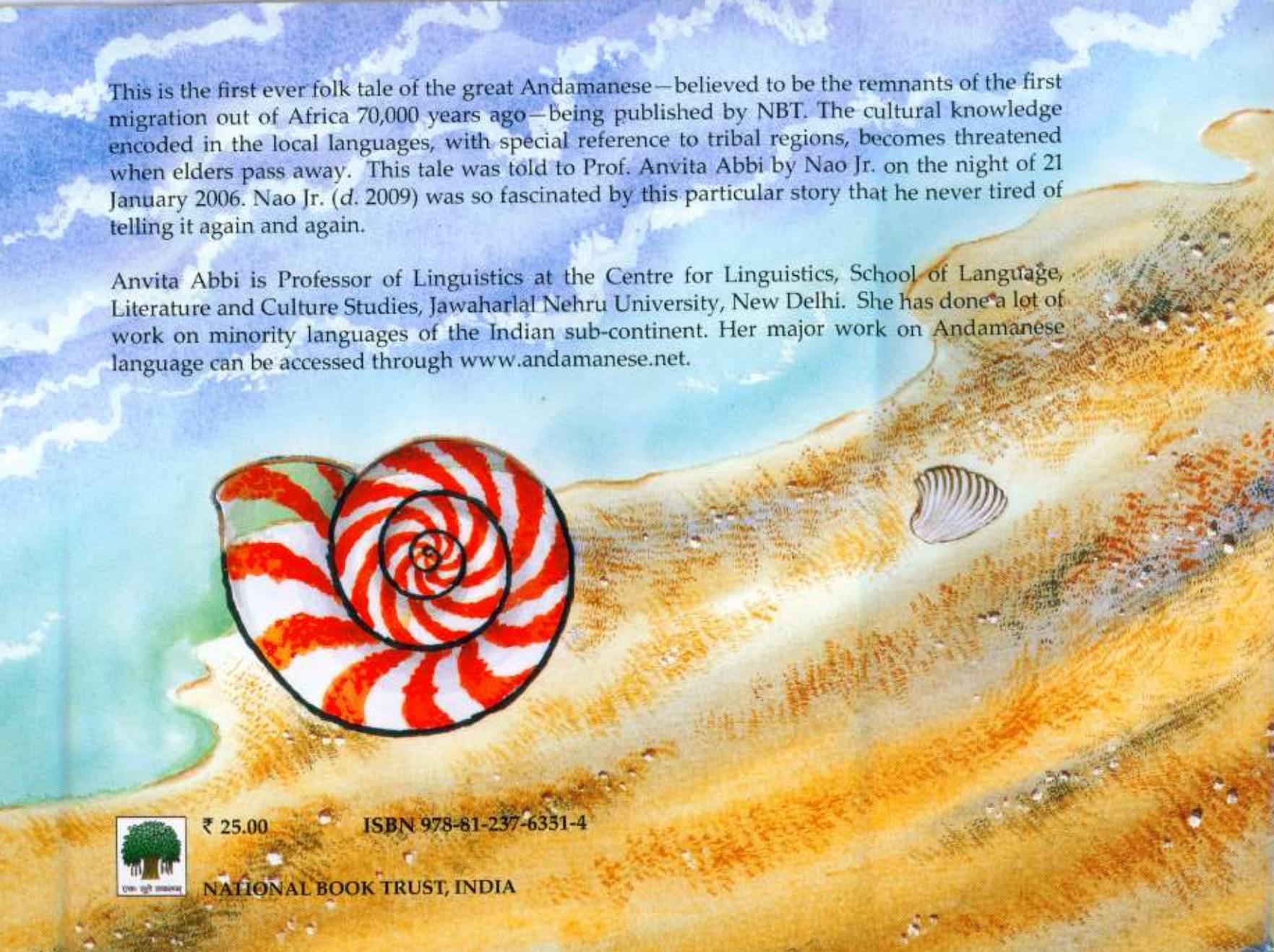
Kot did not like his suggestion. She said, "How can we leave our children's place?"

Phertajido said, "We will inform our children and then go."

He gathered all the members of his family at one place. Phertajido tried to convince them. He said, "My dear children please keep silence for a while. Your father and mother are speaking to you. We have decided to leave this earth. We will go up above the clouds. You should live your life well here. Our time is over. Now we depart."

Thus saying, they went up above the clouds through the rope. Once they reached the top, they cut the rope from above.





This is the first ever folk tale of the great Andamanese—believed to be the remnants of the first migration out of Africa 70,000 years ago—being published by NBT. The cultural knowledge encoded in the local languages, with special reference to tribal regions, becomes threatened when elders pass away. This tale was told to Prof. Anvita Abbi by Nao Jr. on the night of 21 January 2006. Nao Jr. (d. 2009) was so fascinated by this particular story that he never tired of telling it again and again.

Anvita Abbi is Professor of Linguistics at the Centre for Linguistics, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She has done a lot of work on minority languages of the Indian sub-continent. Her major work on Andamanese language can be accessed through www.andamanese.net.



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